

Amendments to the Claims:

Claims 1-6. (canceled)

7. (original) A screening method for inhibitors of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1, which comprises:

- (a) contacting a test compound and a sample containing
  - (i) a peptide containing a vMLC1 amino acid sequence which is functional as cleavage site for caspase-3, and
  - (ii) caspase-3,under predetermined conditions allowing cleavage of the peptide at the cleavage site in the absence of the test compound, followed by
- (b) determining the presence or absence of an inhibition of the protein cleavage activity at the cleavage site as compared to the absence of the test compound, and
- (c) identifying a compound as an inhibitor which provides for the presence of inhibition of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of the protein in step (b).

8. (original) A screening method for selective inhibitors of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 over the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site, which comprises:

- (a) contacting a predetermined amount of an inhibitor identified or identifiable by the screening method of claim 7 and a sample containing
  - (i) a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site,
  - (ii) caspase-3, and optionally
  - (iii) a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 vMLC1 cleavage site,under predetermined conditions allowing cleavage of a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 vMLC1 cleavage site in the absence of the test compound, followed by
- (b) determining the presence or absence of a change of the protein cleavage activity at the cleavage site of the peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site as compared to the absence of the test compound, and

(c) identifying a compound as a selective inhibitor which provides at the predetermined concentration for an essential absence of a change of the protein cleavage activity at the cleavage site of the peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site.

9. (currently amended) The method of claim [[7,]] 8, wherein the ~~screening method for selective inhibitors of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 over the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site of claim 8~~ identification of the inhibitor of step (a) is simultaneously carried out.

10. (canceled)

11. (canceled)

12. (original) A cell assay for screening for inhibitors of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1, which comprises

- (a) providing a culture of isolated cardiomyocytes,
- (b) introducing activated caspase-3 into cardiomyocytes of step (a),
- (c) determining the presence or absence of a reduction of the extent of caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 and/or an improvement of cell contractility under predetermined conditions in the presence of a test compound as compared to the absence of the test compound,
- (d) identifying a compound as an inhibitor which provides for the presence of inhibition of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 and/or for an improved cell contractility in step (c).

13. (currently amended) A cell assay for screening for selective inhibitors of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 over the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site, which comprises

- (a) providing a culture of isolated cardiomyocytes,
- (b) introducing activated caspase-3 into cardiomyocytes of step (a),

(c) determining the presence or absence of a change of the extent of protein cleavage at the cleavage site of the peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site in the presence of a predetermined amount of an inhibitor identified or identifiable by the assay of claim 12 as compared to the absence of the inhibitor, and

(e) (d) identifying a compound as a selective inhibitor which provides in the predetermined amount for an essential absence of a change of the protein cleavage at the cleavage site of the peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site.

14. (currently amended) The assay of ~~claims 12, claim 13~~, wherein the assay for ~~screening for selective inhibitors of the caspase-3 mediated cleavage of vMLC1 over the caspase-3 mediated cleavage of a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site of claim 13~~ identification of the inhibitor of step (c) is simultaneously carried out.

15. (original) An *in vivo* assay for screening for inhibitors of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1, which comprises

(a) providing an animal model, preferably for heart failure,  
(b) administering a test compound to the animal model of step (a),  
(c) determining the presence or absence of a reduction of the extent of caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 and/or an improvement of heart failure under predetermined conditions in the presence of the test compound as compared to the absence of the test compound,

(d) identifying a compound as an inhibitor which provides for the presence of inhibition of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 and/or for an improvement of heart failure in step (c).

16. (currently amended) An *in vivo* assay for screening for selective inhibitors of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 over the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site, which comprises

(a) providing an animal model, preferably for heart failure,  
(b) administering a test compound to the animal model of step (a),

(c) determining the presence or absence of a change of the extent of protein cleavage at the cleavage site of the peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site in the presence of a predetermined amount of an inhibitor identified or identifiable by the assay of ~~one of claims 7 to 15~~ claim 7 as compared to the absence of the inhibitor, and

(d) identifying a compound as a selective inhibitor which provides in the predetermined amount for an essential absence of a change of the protein cleavage activity at the cleavage site of the peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site.

17. (currently amended) ~~The assay of claims 15, claim 16, wherein the assay for screening for selective inhibitors of the caspase-3 mediated cleavage of vMLC1 over the caspase-3 mediated cleavage of a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site of claim 16~~ identification of the inhibitor of step (c) is simultaneously carried out.

18. (canceled)

19. (canceled)

20. (currently amended) A kit[[Kit]]-of-parts for identifying inhibitors of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 according to claim 7, ~~comprising the following components:~~

- (i) a first component comprising a peptide containing an essential ventricular myosin light chain amino acid sequence, which is functional as cleavage site for caspase-3, and
- (ii) a second component comprising caspase-3.

21. (currently amended) A kit[[Kit]]-of-parts for identifying selective inhibitors of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 over the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site according to claim 8, ~~comprising the following components:~~

- (i) a first component comprising a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site,
- (ii) a second component containing caspase-3, and optionally

(iii) a third component comprising a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 vMLC1 cleavage site.

22. (currently amended) An inhibitor ~~Inhibitor~~ of caspase-3-mediated cleavage of essential ventricular myosin light chain obtained or obtainable by the method of ~~any one of claims 1 to 19~~ claim 1.

23. (original) The inhibitor according to claim 22, which is a selective inhibitor of the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1 over the caspase-3-mediated cleavage of a peptide containing a functional caspase-3 DEVD cleavage site.

24. (canceled)

25. (canceled)

26. (currently amended) A medicine ~~Medicine~~ containing as an active agent a compound which is characterized by inhibiting caspase-3-mediated cleavage of vMLC1.

27. (currently amended) A peptide ~~Peptide~~ containing the sequence DFVE as amino acid sequence of essential myosin light chain which is functional as cleavage site for caspase-3, with the exception of native essential myosin light chain.